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SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: RICE SPEECH ON IRAN

1. Summary: UAE's Arabic dailies all featured Secretary Rice's remarks on Iran. UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Bin Zayed, told the UAE official News Agency (WAM) that the UAEG welcomes the American proposal to hold direct talks with Iran over Tehran's nuclear program, describing it as a step towards a peaceful breakthrough in the current crisis. An unsigned editorial in Dubai-based Arabic daily "Al-Bayan" described Rice's speech as "a new ray of hope" to finding an acceptable breakthrough. Dubai-based English daily "Gulf News" questions how serious the U.S. is in resolving the nuclear dispute with Iran. End summary

2. Remarks made by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on Washington's readiness to join direct talks with Europe on Iran's nuclear program, if Tehran suspends all uranium enrichment activities received prominent coverage in the UAE's press. Examples include:

A front-page headline in Abu Dhabi-based semi-official Arabic daily "Al-Ittihad" (circulation 65,000) reads: "America proposes conditional negotiations with Iran." Another inside page story with photo of the Secretary read: "Proposing conditional negotiations and a diplomatic solution, Washington recognizes Iran's right in a peaceful nuclear program."

Sharjah-based Arabic daily "Al-Khaleej" (circulation 85,000) headlined: "The UAE welcomes the American proposal for direct talks with Iran." Another inside-page headline added: "Washington is on the verge of holding multinational talks with Iran."

A front-page headline in Dubai-based Arabic daily "Al-Bayan" (circulation 90,000) read: "America proposes to enter direct talks with Iran over the nuclear file."

3. Wakalat Anba Al-Emarat (WAM), the official news agency for the UAE government carried the following statement from UAE Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed: "The UAE welcomes the American proposal to hold direct talks with Iran over its nuclear program". He described the proposal as "a positive step towards a peaceful breakthrough in the current crisis...the American proposal which has received support from the EU goes in line with the policies of the region's nations and their keenness to reach a peaceful solution." He concluded that "the GCC nations contribute effectively in the international efforts towards a peaceful solution."

4. An unsigned 6/1 editorial in Dubai-based Arabic daily "Al-Bayan" opines (circulation 90,000):

"Suddenly and in the midst of the darkness that surrounds the region, a new ray of hope shines. It is a new ray that would constitute an acceptable breakthrough and defuse the dangers from one of the most explosive files: the Iranian nuclear file... Our region is full of disputes, tensions and is standing on the verge of an abyss and any new explosion may lead the region to the point of no return. This explains the importance of the statement made by Iranian Foreign Minister in Malaysia in which he voiced the desire and willingness of his nation to hold immediate, direct talks with the European Troika without any conditions over the nuclear program adding that Iran may consider direct talks with Washington once it changes its behavior.... The new Iranian position and the American and European responses make the picture complete and at the same time reflect a desire to engage in a dialogue on the part of all parties. In Washington the calls for direct talks with Iran have increased and the troubles in Iraq may have opened many eyes against any further regional escalations... All parties must not let this moment pass without completing this dangerous topic once and for ever."

5. In an unsigned editorial in Dubai based English language daily "Gulf News" under the headline "Old Whine with new label" 6/2 (circulation 90,000):
"The latest U.S. "offer" to Iran over the nuclear energy controversy has the EU shouting loud hurrahs in praise. But then EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana, the head cheerleader, is

the eternal optimist even when he has no cause to be so. At least, when called upon, he can provide diplomatic placatory words of comfort in an attempt to ease tensions. But the U.S. offer to talk, while approaching a new and less confrontational line, is so riddled with conditions which have previously been rejected by Iran, that it poses the question of how serious the U.S. is in resolving the dispute. The Big Five UN Security Council, veto-wielding members, meet in Vienna, with Germany, a rotating member, to decide where next to go but they are unsure where. Iran's intransigence, with assistance from China and Russia, has forced the hand of the U.S. All is brinkmanship, but people's lives could be at stake."

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